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# OVERVIEW

The nature of retail requires constant adaptation — to markets, to technology, to supply chains and more. For the past three years, historic recalibrations taking place across the world have come in waves, through surges in online buying, through supply chain disruptions and through inflation. Then, on Nov. 30, 2022, OpenAI launched ChatGPT.

Throughout 2023, ChatGPT's debut reverberated across industries. Artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLMs) were not new concepts, but ChatGPT brought the terms into new offices and living rooms (and, of course, living room offices). Microsoft, thanks to its investment in OpenAI, began integrating ChatGPT into its software, including — now — Dynamics 365 Commerce, which uses Microsoft 365 Copilot.

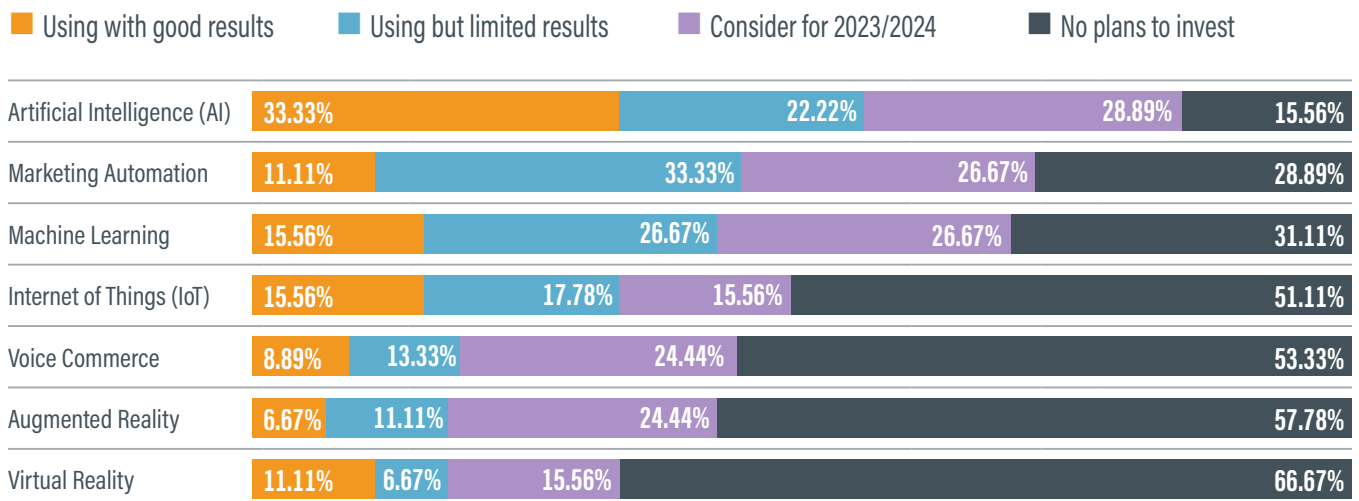
In the meantime, other ecommerce platforms have launched their own AI-enabled features. Adobe is using it to bolster its Live Search capabilities. Shopify's Magic offering promises new ways to personalize ecommerce sites and lighten workloads on the backend. NetSuite Commerce is using AI to power recommendations and ease decision-making for its clients. And those announcements were just grains of sand in an expanding beach of new updates that have dominated tradeshow presentations and press release headlines.

The 2024 edition of Digital Commerce 360's Ecommerce Platforms Report could easily have a catalogue of just these AI announcements from the past year. But that would not have provided a full story about the state of the infrastructure that powers online retail.

At a time when economic turbulence and layoffs are still washing through the retail industry, the marketing and hype (though not all of it is hype) behind new features speaks to real and immediate needs. Merchants with smaller teams than they had one year ago are looking for ways to ease workloads while remaining competitive. Small retailers who never had large teams to begin with are looking for ways to punch above their weight. All the while, ecommerce platforms are looking to expand their lists of clients as well, bringing lessons from B2C ecommerce to the world of B2B.

This report will introduce you to the retailers, platforms, and analysts that the Digital Commerce 360 team spoke with while assessing the ecommerce platform landscape at the beginning of 2024. Thanks to our ongoing research for the Top 1000, we already know which platforms are most popular among North America's largest online retailers. We know who these platforms' major clients are, and we have a reasonable idea of the sales volumes that flow through them.

## THINKING ABOUT SOME OF THE NEWER TECHNOLOGIES TO COME TO MARKET, WHICH DESCRIBES YOUR CURRENT INTEREST LEVEL?



Source: Digital Commerce 360. Based on 78 Respondents

At the same time, we already knew that AI was everywhere. But who is really using it? Is it working? And what are the use cases that justify its place as a priority for new investments? (We have the survey data to back that up, too.)

2024 will be a year of experimentation for these platforms and the retailers that use them. There is a cautious optimism in the air about the opportunities these investments will unlock. If those expectations are met, it is possible that this year will be just the beginning of new buildouts and new ways of customizing and catering to the next generation of online shoppers. [👉](#)

## RETAILERS FACTOR IN FEATURES, COST AS THEY FIND THE RIGHT ECOMMERCE PLATFORM FOR THEM

An executive conversation with **Ben Lorenz**, managing director and co-founder, Human Element



Ecommerce platforms are constantly changing. As they continue to innovate with new tools and tactics to boost sales — including AI-generated content — retailers need to integrate new systems to upgrade their ecommerce websites. From there, they can capitalize on what the platform offers to create smooth experiences for their customers. To discuss how merchants select ecommerce platforms, Digital Commerce 360 spoke with Ben Lorenz, managing director and co-founder at Human Element.

### **How do an ecommerce platform's features factor into when a merchant should upgrade?**

We're reaching this bell curve where we're starting to get a lot of feature parity between the ecommerce platforms that are out there. We're entering an age where upgrading to an ecommerce platform falls under either a return on investment decision, or a comfortability factor with the team. And so right now, we do a lot in terms of determining what the return on investment is, what the total cost of ownership is, and how the licensing works out between each one of the platforms.

### **How does Human Element go about creating more user-friendly, self-serviceable customer experiences for its clients' ecommerce sites?**

We'll do a conversion analysis first. We'll use analytics to do this, and we'll see where in the purchase process people are falling off. It could be a time-on-task issue, or it could be a time-on-page issue that doesn't lead to a conversion. You need a human in place to start to digest that information, understand what type of tests, what type of factors you're looking for that will smooth the transaction out — so you can convert at the best rate possible. One thing ecommerce platforms in general are doing very well is they have built off-the-shelf templates that are already taking advantage of some of these types of things.

### **Ecommerce platforms' investments in artificial intelligence continue to grow. Where does AI matter most at the moment?**

On the software level, there are some helpers within the coding platforms we use. We use a system that allows a plug-in for AI to generate repeatable tasks. If our coders are working on building a form inside of a web page, the AI assistant will say, "It looks like you're trying to build a form. Just tell me what the fields are and we'll build the form for you."

On the marketing level, product-description details are becoming AI-driven, so we don't have to manually write descriptions for 10,000 products. It's also getting some traction in search engine optimization (SEO) — how you're tagging pages and keywords. It's recognizing and can change those elements on the fly to represent what searches are coming in.

### **How might merchants decide which platform makes sense for their businesses?**

You can draw the line by assessing how comfortable you are as a company with having a software-as-a-service (SaaS) product. You technically don't have a tangible product, so we see customers balk a little bit at that. In the case of B2C customers, it's a lot easier to go with shared base code. On the flip side, a B2B customer has some pretty highly customized rules, and so the ecommerce system has to play nicely with how the ERP system wants to do things like negotiated pricing.

Almost any platform can do the job you need it to do. The hardest part is finding a partner in a systems integrator you can work with, that you trust, and that you feel is a part of your team. That selection process is as important as a platform discussion.

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# AS TECH SPENDING INCREASES IN 2024, SO WILL INTEREST IN AI

In ecommerce, some business needs remain perennial. Retaining existing customers and attracting new ones will always be core motivators. Nevertheless, the technology and tools that businesses invest in can change. Digital Commerce 360 surveyed readers about their technology priorities in 2024, asking what they expect to do, why, and how satisfied they are with their current ecommerce platforms. The results offered a glimpse at how prominently artificial intelligence (AI) features in business decisions right now, as well as what changes online retailers want to make in their technology stacks.

The survey reflected answers from 122 respondents in Q4 2023, asking them to look ahead to the new year. Participants included ecommerce service providers and web-only/web-mostly retailers, as well as retail chains or store-based retailers, consumer brand manufacturers and others.

## COMPANIES EXPECT TO SPEND MORE

More than half (57.0%) of those responding expected to spend more on ecommerce technology in 2024 than they did in 2023, according to the survey results. Only 13.9% anticipated decreases in spending, 29.1% said they thought spending would remain the same.



The size of increases appeared to be modest with 31.1% expecting to spend 5.1%-10% more on technology in 2024. Another 29.7% projected spending to increase by 5% or less. Only 5.41% indicated they would increase spending by more than 50%.

In allocating these 2024 budgets, respondents heavily prioritized similar goals.

## ATTRACTING NEW CUSTOMERS WHILE KEEPING OLD ONES

The most widely cited reasons for technology spending in 2024 related to two simple, underlying objectives. 49.3% of respondents want to attract new customers, while 45.1% wish to improve the customer experience they provide. 28.2% said explicitly that they are focused on retaining their existing customers.

Other common responses appeared to flow from these ambitions, with 40.9% desiring improved conversion rates and 31.0% articulating that they want to generate more sales from repeat customers.

In more nuanced answers related to user experience, respondents also replied that they want to improve site performance, speed and efficiency (32.4%), as well as better personalize shopping experiences (31.0%).

## WILL YOUR SPENDING ON ECOMMERCE TECHNOLOGY AND SERVICES INCREASE, DECREASE OR REMAIN THE SAME OVER THE NEXT YEAR?

Increase  
56.25%

Decrease  
13.75%

Remain the same  
30.00%

Source: Digital Commerce 360. Based on 78 Respondents

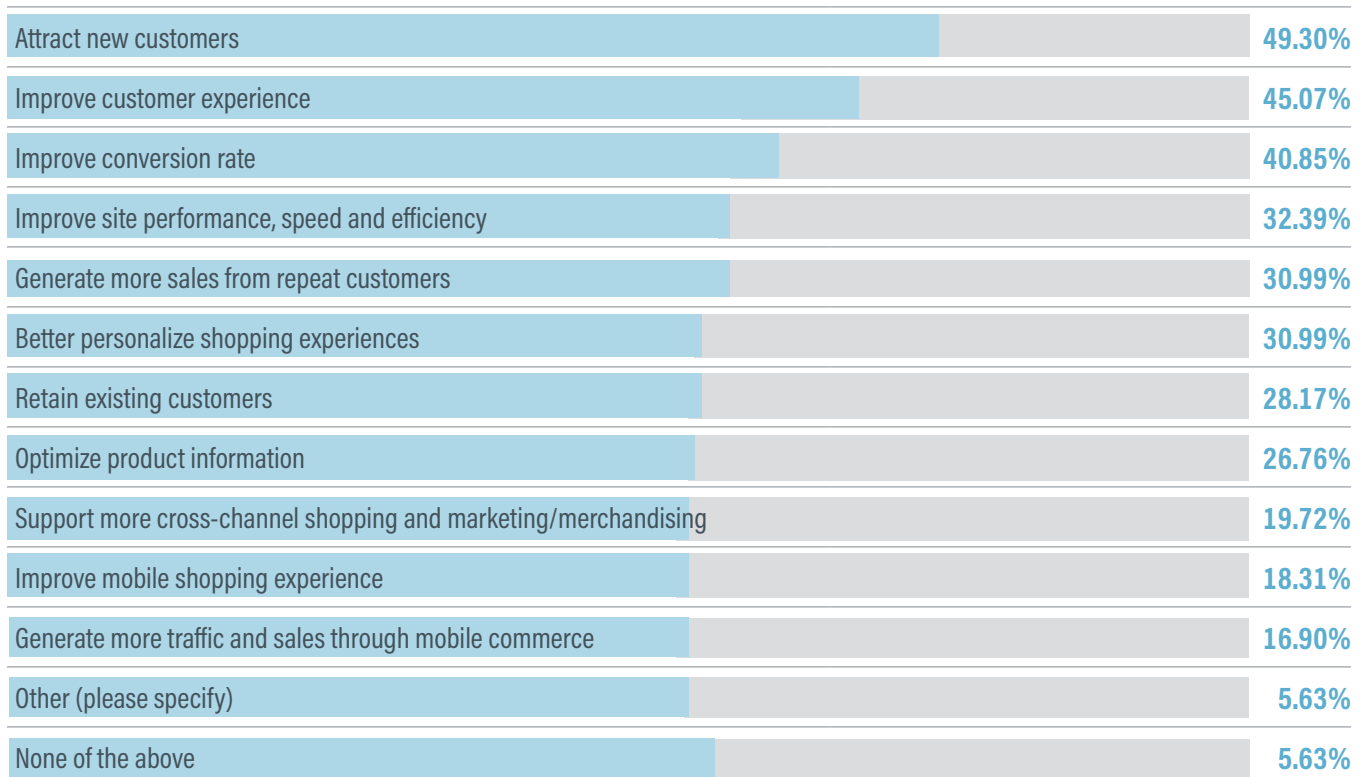
Meanwhile, the areas where companies are investing to achieve those ends vary.

## INTEREST IN EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

In aligning budgets with new technologies, companies were more likely to know which technologies they would not invest in in 2024 than which technologies they would consider for new investments. Asked where they had no plans to invest, virtual reality (66.7%), augmented reality (57.8%), voice commerce (53.3%) and internet of things (51.1%) appeared as answers by more than half of the question's respondents.

## WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN REASONS FOR SPENDING MORE ON ECOMMERCE TECHNOLOGY OVER THE NEXT YEAR?

Check all that apply.



Source: Digital Commerce 360. Based on 78 Respondents

At the other end of the confidence spectrum, only one technology showed up in more than 20% of participants' answers as both something they are already using with good results (33.3%) and are actively considering for new investment (28.9%). That was AI.

AI outperformed all other new technology fields on the survey, demonstrating both awareness and interest among online retailers. It is also an area where retailers expend to spend.

## HIGHEST BUDGET PRIORITIES

AI may not have ranked No. 1 for everyone in the survey, but 15.9% of those answering did say it was one of their top budget priorities going into the new year. The real No. 1 was content management (31.8%). That was followed by search engine optimization (23.8%), website performance management (23.8%), customer relationship management (22.2%) and online marketing (22.2%).

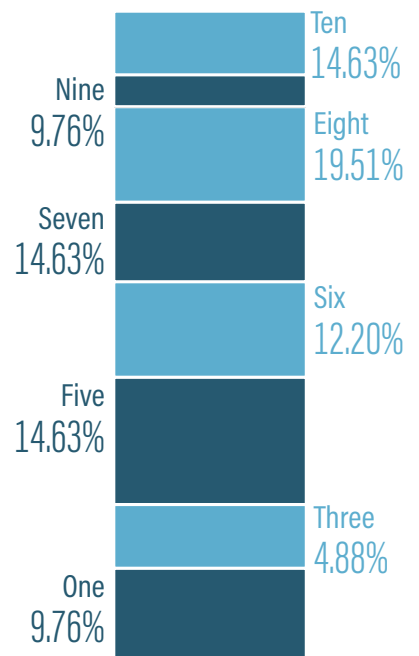
Other priorities were mixed, with PIM and other product data management (20.6%) and ecommerce platform (19.1%) also proving to be on retailers' minds.

## ECOMMERCE PLATFORM SATISFACTION

Asked how they feel about their current ecommerce platforms, satisfaction seemed to be the norm, with only 27.3% of those answering saying that they intend to switch to a new platform in 2024. That confidence was reflected when respondents were asked to characterize how effective their technology investments had been in driving conversions in 2022. More than half said their ecommerce platform investments were either very effective (28.6%) or at least somewhat effective (40.8%). That rate of very effective responses by category was topped only by site search (30.6%).

ON A SCALE OF 1-10 WHERE 10 IS COMPLETELY SATISFIED, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR PLATFORM'S PERFORMANCE IN 2023?

Ten = High satisfaction  
One = Low satisfaction  
4 and 2 = 0.00%



Source: Digital Commerce 360.  
Based on 78 Respondents

### WHAT ARE YOUR TOP FIVE ECOMMERCE TECHNOLOGY BUDGET PRIORITIES OVER THE NEXT YEAR?

Select up to five priorities.

Content management	31.75%	Personalization	15.87%
Search engine optimization	23.81%	Omnichannel	14.29%
Website performance management	23.81%	Warehouse and fulfillment management	14.29%
Customer relationship management	22.22%	Customer reviews/ratings	11.11%
Online marketing	22.22%	Supply chain management	11.11%
PIM and other product data management	20.63%	International ecommerce services	9.52%
Ecommerce platform	19.05%	Payment, security systems and fraud prevention	9.52%
Order management	19.05%	Customer service software	7.94%
Web analytics	19.05%	Email marketing	7.94%
Affiliate marketing	17.46%	Sales tax management	7.94%
Marketplace/channel management (selling on third-party marketplaces)	17.46%	Fulfillment services	6.35%
Site search	17.46%	Social media	6.35%
Artificial intelligence	15.87%	Web hosting/cloud services	4.76%

Source: Digital Commerce 360. Based on 78 Respondents

Among survey takers, the most checked BigCommerce (11.4%) or SAP Hybris (11.4%) as the ecommerce platform on which their site was built. Magento/Adobe (9.1%), Oracle (9.09%), Salesforce Commerce Cloud (9.1%) and WooCommerce (9.1%) were also among the most used. 6.8% used Shopify, while another 6.8% cited a custom-built solution.

Asked to rate their levels of satisfaction with their ecommerce platforms on a 1-10 scale, with 10 being completely satisfied, the vast majority of respondents (85.4%) rated themselves at five or higher. 14.6% selected 10.

For those considering a switch to a new platform, however, some pointed to specific technologies that would influence their choices.

The most selected category was headless commerce/microservices approach (41.7%), showing an openness to that option.

Commercial software hosted internally (25.0%) was also cited, with no one selecting internally developed and internally hosted.

Asked to name which platform they would consider most strongly as a new alternative, only 12 participants opted to share, but answers varied widely. Oracle was chosen twice, with BigCommerce, custom-built solutions, Magento/Adobe, Shopify, Shopify Plus, VTEX, Weblinc/Workarea and other individually submitted answers all showing up once each.

## WHY RETAILERS LOOK TO OUTSIDE VENDORS

More than half of those survey takers (56.3%) said they typically use a vendor to implement new technology instead of trying to do so in-house. And the most common reason for doing so was simple. 84.0% said they just do not have in-house expertise at their companies. The other most common responses were needing a vendor specialized in a specific field (44.0%) and the speed of project completion (40.0%). Cost savings from using an outside vendor also appeared on 24.0% of responses.

As for what they were getting from those vendors, AI also appeared high on this list on 28.0% of answers. No. 1 in this section of the survey was customer relationship management (32.0%). AI was right behind with ecommerce platform (28.0%), email marketing (28.0%) and web analytics (24.0%) also showing up in more than one-fifth of responses.

Survey participants evaluating their vendors from the past year also appeared to have had their expectations met with in recent projects, with 64.0% saying those projects went as expected. Only 16.0% thought their projects with vendors had gone poorly.

Characterizing those experiences, 34.5% of respondents said their projects with vendors had been on time and on budget, with 21.7% saying the projects were on time and over budget.

Asked what they looked for when choosing a vendor, the two most-cited factors on the survey were a responsive team (59.1%) and working well with a client's other technology systems (59.1%). Close behind were great references, technology that is easy to implement and use, willingness to negotiate on contract terms, and guaranteed response times when things go wrong (all 45.5%). [↗](#)



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# B2B COMMERCE TECHNOLOGY ADJUSTS TO BUYERS' DEMANDS

Today's B2B buyers — a rapidly increasing number of them digital-first — expect a personalized, quick and easy online experience that helps them complete complex online orders. As these desires compound, B2B ecommerce technology options can help sellers fit the bill.

Over the past several years, significant change slammed into B2B commerce, setting a new performance bar that has left some B2B companies reaching for digital success while others have leaped ahead.

At the same time, the digital technology underlying successful B2B digital commerce strategies has also forged ahead. B2B ecommerce platforms and extended ecosystems for engaging with customers, managing supply chains and fulfilling customer orders have become more flexible and scalable, with various deployment options and cost levels now available.

B2B ecommerce strategy and technology, of course, have steadily evolved over the last 20-plus years. But the combination of the COVID-19 pandemic, which shifted significant volumes of B2B business online, and the





emergence of young, digital-first B2B buyers and procurement managers accelerated B2B ecommerce adoption.

## A 'DIFFERENT WORLD' FOR ECOMMERCE TECHNOLOGY

Fortunately for buyers and sellers, B2B ecommerce technology has also made sharp gains, ushering in many more options driven by the cloud and API-based integrations for deploying online ways to connect with customers.

“It’s just a different world now,” says Mark A. Pickett, a former senior digital commerce executive at the multibillion-dollar ecommerce companies Staples and MSC Industrial Supply Co. Pickett is now the founding partner of Black Phoenix Group, a firm that is helping manufacturers like Chicago-based H&K Perforating Cos. go digital.

Pickett says executives overseeing ecommerce technology and strategy today have more options to deploy and modify digital commerce platforms.

H&K Perforating, for example, is deploying a “no-code” Webflow platform, which provides a graphical interface for launching a website on which H&K can plug in ecommerce and other applications.

With APIs ubiquitous as tools of ecommerce technology integration and becoming easier to use for sharing data among software applications, many ecommerce platform vendors are more flexible in working with clients who may want to pursue a composable deployment strategy, choosing and implementing technology applications from multiple sources.



“It’s just a different world now.”

— Mark A. Pickett, founding partner, Black Phoenix Group

“For the past few years, we’ve been isolating and making independently available key functions or services of our platform,” says Jamus Driscoll, CEO of Elastic Path, a provider of a headless commerce platform that uses APIs to connect customer-facing interfaces like transactional websites and mobile apps with an ecommerce engine and enterprise resource planning software for such B2B companies as Konica Minolta, Keysight Technologies and Illumina Inc. By keeping the customer-facing interfaces independent of — but connected to — the back-end systems, companies can modify their front ends without having to modify software code on their back ends.

## PERSONALIZED B2B MERCHANDISING

The increasingly common use of APIs and microservices is taking the headless approach to a higher level of flexibility and customization under the composable commerce strategy of choosing microservices applications from multiple vendors catering to specific functions, such as personalized B2B merchandising and voice-activated ordering.

Ash Trasi, Illumina’s director of IT and digital experience, says the biotech products company uses Elastic Path’s mix of headless and composable technology options to deploy customized applications, including a shipping scheduler designed to let customers split bulk orders of biotech materials across multiple delivery dates. He adds that using APIs and microservices is faster and less costly than the more traditional route of writing software code under a legacy ecommerce platform.

Cargo Crew, which manufactures uniforms and sells them online to restaurants, hotels and other businesses, is using a headless/composable platform from commerce tools to deploy highly personalized ecommerce portals for corporate clients. For instance,

a portal may have a custom ordering feature that lets buyers place bulk orders broken out by different uniform requirements and sizes, says Mike Sharp, chief product officer at commercetools.

He and others say the overall goal of modern ecommerce platforms is to provide client companies with the right combination of technology applications that adds value to their customers' ecommerce experience.

## DEPLOYING ECOMMERCE TOOLS THAT GENERATE VALUE

“Technology solutions in a composable world are plentiful, accessible and affordable for anyone,” says Joe Albrecht, CEO of B2B digital agency Xngage. “It’s not a matter of company size, but of maturity and approach. Companies should identify the right set of tools, technologies and fit for their near-term and future needs.”

He points to such emerging commerce applications as voice-activated online ordering for B2B buyers that can be plugged into a composable ecommerce platform, freeing them having to punch orders into a laptop or mobile device.

“Organizations need to shift their mindset away from ‘we need an ecommerce platform to take orders online’ to ‘our customers demand innovative touchpoints,’” Albrecht says.

Still, some ecommerce practitioners and advisors may balk at the idea of taking on the tasks of managing what can be an extensive set of APIs and microservices in a composable strategy. And for B2B ecommerce, with all its complexity of products and orders, a fully composable approach can be impractical, asserts Jay Schneider, founder and CEO of digital agency B2B Squared.



“Where composable elements add value, you can bring those in.”

— Jay Schneider,  
CEO, B2B Squared



“Organizations need to shift their mindset away from ‘we need an ecommerce platform to take orders online’ to ‘our customers demand innovative touchpoints.’”

— Joe Albrecht, CEO, Xngage

The key is finding the right mix of technology, he says.

“A number of ecommerce technology vendors have been working to provide a platform that decouples a lot of the functionality around catalogs, account management, checkout and some other things into an API environment, such that where composable elements add value, you can bring those in,” he says, adding: “Site search is a really great example because platform vendors are not always able to invest in search the way it should be, and when you look at the value of plugging in a third-party search it can be significant in terms of conversions and revenue.” He adds that Algolia is one plug-in that has developed a helpful AI-enhanced B2B search platform designed to personalize results for B2B buyers.

## LOOKING AHEAD

More vital B2B plug-in applications are on the way, Albrecht says.

“The next 10 years will be powered by those cloud-native technology vendors who offer business value over technology and do so with a truly agile and composable ecosystem, allowing customers and services partners to engineer solutions quickly, efficiently, and by focusing on making customer experiences disruptive,” he says. “Without a doubt, this will include AI-powered experiences and voice-controlled interactions and much more. It is going to be an exciting time.” 🚀

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# CONCLUSION

Every replatforming project is unique

No company is exactly like another company. And that means no two companies will have the same requirements of their ecommerce platform or exactly the same existing systems that will have to work with a new platform.

Success starts with understanding your company's requirements and existing technology in detail, then finding a vendor that meets your most important needs and implementing the new platform in a gradual, methodical manner.

Keep in mind Flath's recommendation: "Be patient." Ecommerce is increasingly complex, and that means the systems that enable online selling have more features and must connect to more systems. That also means there are many departments within an organization that have a stake in the new platform.

By listening carefully to all stakeholders and making inevitable modifications along the way, B2C and B2B companies can successfully upgrade their ecommerce platforms and sell online with greater success. [↔](#)



The Latest Trends in B2B Ecommerce Report includes key featured articles published directly from the full Ecommerce Platforms Report.

[Learn more about the full report](#)



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